

Roanoke's Regions

City of Roanoke

Roanoke Metropolitan Statistical Area

Roanoke Valley

Greater Roanoke Region

New Century Region

3.1 HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS

BACKGROUND

Demographic Changes and Challenges

Roanoke's population has fluctuated over time from a peak of more than 100,000 residents in the 1980s to 94,911 residents in 2000. During this same time period, the population of the Roanoke Metropolitan Statistical Area has grown by seven percent, while the City's share of total population has declined by five percent. This data leads to two conclusions: 1) Roanoke is losing residents to its neighbors through out-migration; and 2) new residents are moving to the region but are choosing not to live in the City. Roanoke's median household income fell one percent from 1996 to 1997, while the median household income in Salem, Roanoke County, and Botetourt County rose more than six percent over the same period. The median household income in Roanoke County is nearly twice as high (\$47,838) as the City's median household income of \$27,492.

Neighborhood Development Patterns

Many of Roanoke's neighborhoods are diverse urban areas with compact development patterns and a mix of residential, retail, and office uses, along with parks, religious institutions, schools, and other public facilities. Traditional neighborhoods formed on the edges of the downtown area, with small neighborhood commercial nodes offering a mix of neighborhood-

oriented businesses and services. As the City grew, larger residential subdivisions developed on the fringes with commercial activity concentrated along corridors or in distinctly separate districts. In the 1970s, many of Roanoke's traditional neighborhoods were rezoned to allow higher-density residential use. Recent planning efforts have sought to reverse this trend by reducing the permitted density in many neighborhoods while focusing higher-density development around neighborhood commercial nodes.



Neighborhood Planning

Neighborhood plans provide detailed information for specific areas and guide public and private decisions regarding land use, capital improvements, and other projects. Neighborhood plans are adopted as components of the City's comprehensive plan. The City

has identified 46 neighborhoods for which detailed plans should be adopted. Plans have been completed for approximately 25% of the City's neighborhoods; it is anticipated that all neighborhoods will have completed plans in the next five years. (See map on page 38.)

Housing Stock

Roanoke has approximately 45,000 housing units, 60% of which are single-family units. Approximately half of all dwelling units are owner-occupied. More than 90% of the City's housing stock was constructed prior to 1975; fewer than 6% (approximately 2,600 units) have been built since 1990. New residential development is constrained by the limited number and size of available sites. To significantly increase the number of new dwelling units in the City, a housing strategy could be developed that conducts an inventory of vacant lots that can be converted or redeveloped for residential, commercial, and/or industrial purposes.

Housing Conditions

In 1986, the City adopted a Building Maintenance Code that establishes a standard for building maintenance citywide. The Code is part of the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code and is based on the BOCA National Property Maintenance Code. The City currently estimates that 1,050 dwelling units are substandard and should be vacated or undergo significant repairs. In 1996, the City established a Rental Inspection Program for rental housing within the City's established conservation and rehabilitation districts (see Map 3.1.1). The program requires an inspection of any rental unit every two years for compliance with the adopted building maintenance code. Designation of other neighborhoods and expansion of the program have been discussed as strategies for improving older housing citywide and ensuring decent safe housing for tenants.

Neighborhood Design District

Roanoke is the only city in the state with the legal authority to regulate architectural design outside of historic districts. In 1994, the City adopted a neighborhood design overlay district to coordinate the design of new construction in designated rehabilitation and conservation areas. Several neighborhoods located in the Rehabilitation and Conservation District were recognized as having unique architectural and historic value: Belmont/Fallon Park, Gainsboro, Kenwood, Loudon Melrose, Gilmer, Harrison, Highland Park, and Hurt Park. The first neighborhood design overlay district is expected to be established in 2001.

Fair Housing

A recent Fair Market Housing study sponsored by the City indicates that Roanoke has a sufficient supply of affordable housing. However, most affordable housing opportunities are concentrated in certain inner-city neighborhoods, which are low-to-moderate income, thereby limiting housing choices citywide. Barriers to housing opportunities include the lack of affordable, good-quality housing in all areas of the City, limited access to information, the need for counseling on housing choices, and the lack of home-purchasing incentives for all neighborhoods.



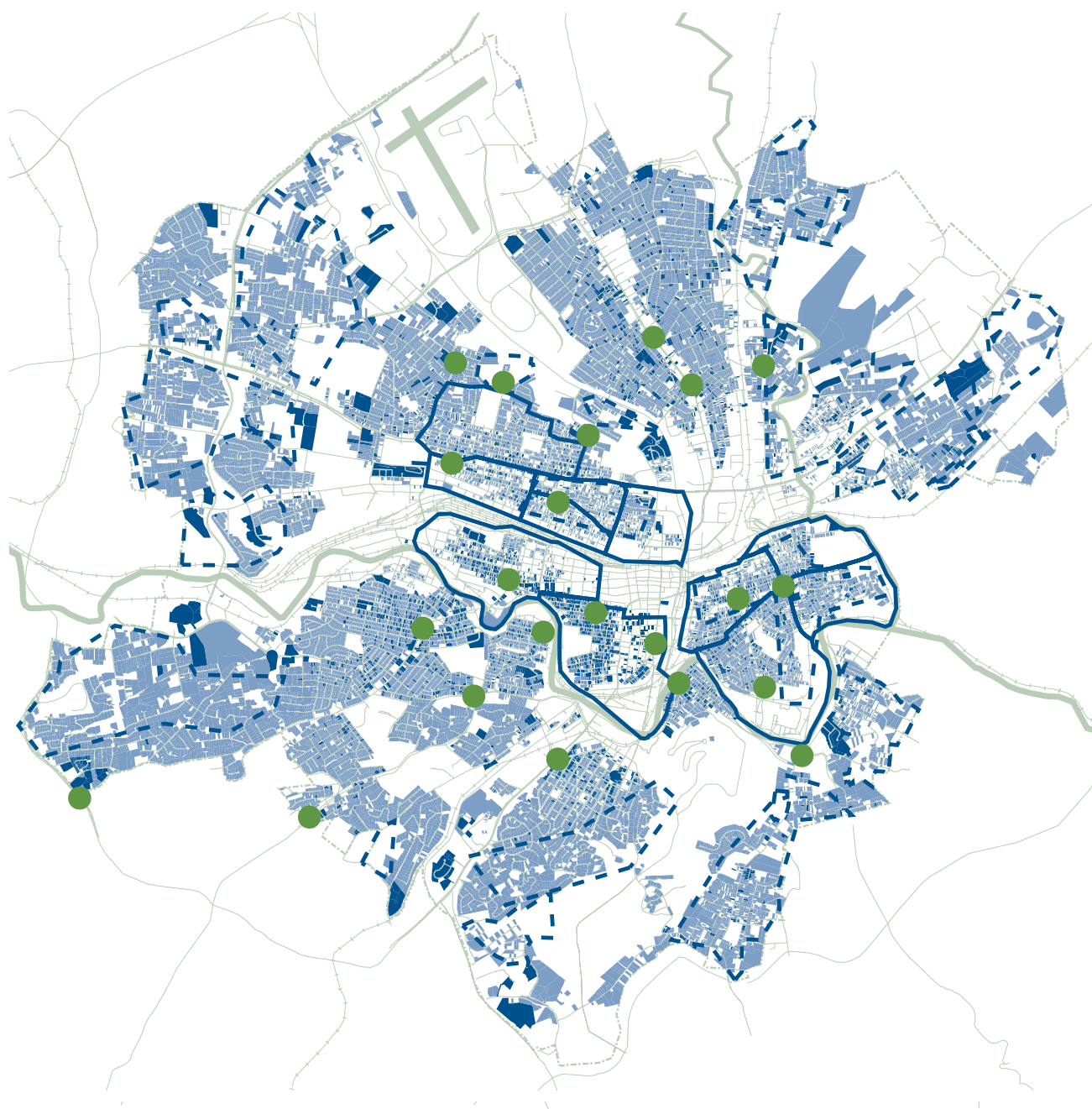
Public Housing

The City of Roanoke provides most of the publicly assisted housing in the Roanoke Valley through the Roanoke Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RRHA), which owns and operates 1,467 subsidized dwelling units. The RRHA received a Housing and Urban

Development HOPE VI Grant for the comprehensive revitalization of the Lincoln Terrace Public Housing Development. This grant addresses a significant portion of the repair needs of Roanoke's public housing stock. The HOPE VI program creates new home ownership opportunities, offers job training, facilitates neighborhood revitalization, and promotes the values of increased family self-sufficiency. The RRHA also administers other public programs to supplement the supply of affordable housing. These programs include Section 8 Rental Assistance Programs including the Section 8 Housing Certificate Program, the Housing Voucher Program, the Moderate Rehabilitation Program, the Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Moderate Rehabilitation Program, and Project Self-Sufficiency.

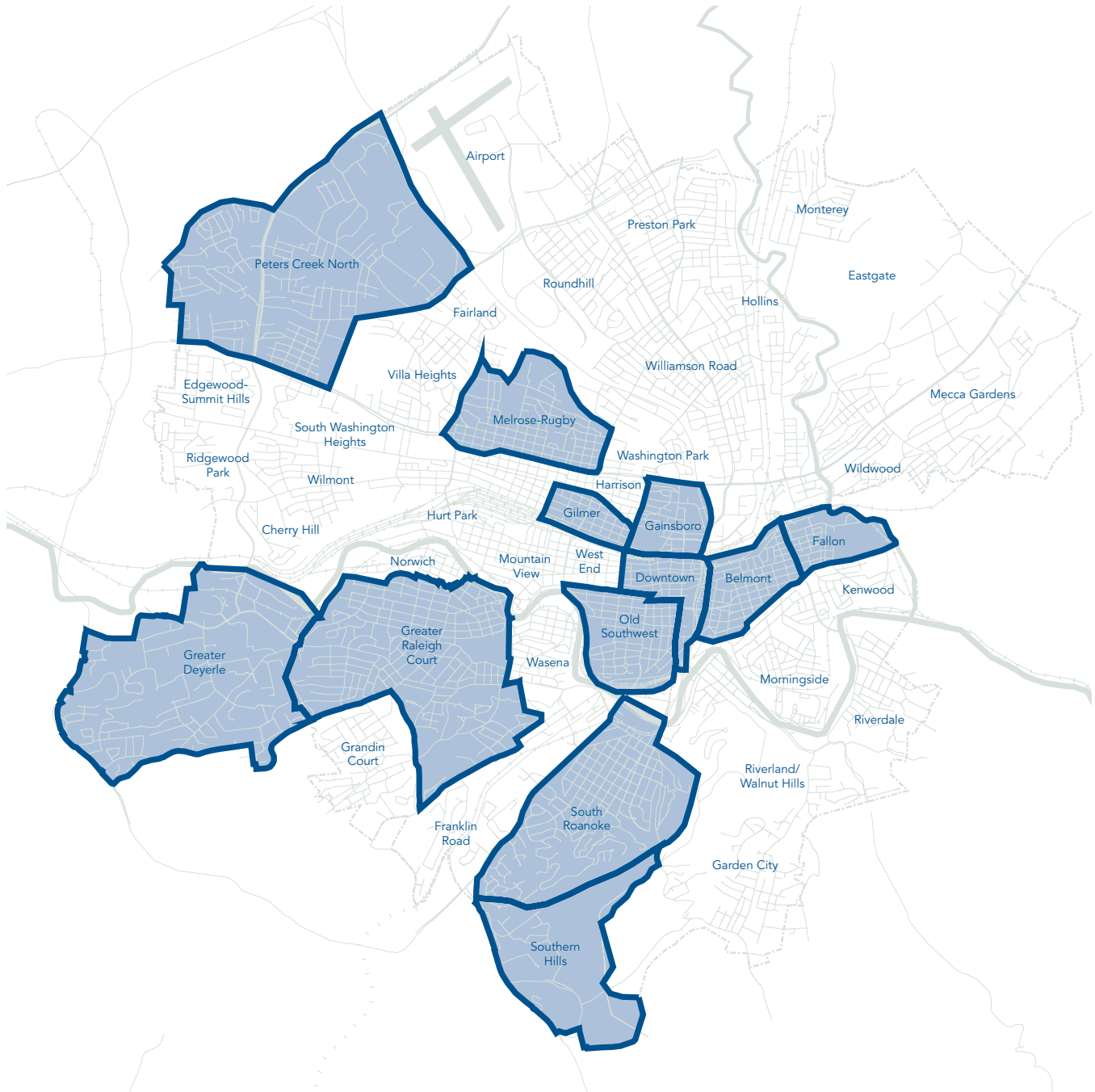
Transitional Housing

The City of Roanoke accommodates the majority of emergency shelters, transitional housing, and support programs for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness in the region. The overnight shelters and transitional housing centers are operated by non-profit organizations. The City of Roanoke operates the Crisis Intervention Center for youth. Resources for at-risk persons and the homeless include the RAM House, TRUST, Roanoke Valley Interfaith Hospitality Network, Samaritan's Inn, and Rescue Mission, which are located within walking distance of downtown.



3.1.1 Housing and Neighborhoods

- Single-family Dwellings
- Multi-family Dwellings
- Housing Opportunities
- Existing and Potential Village Centers
- Conservation and Rehabilitation Districts



3.1.2 Neighborhoods and Area Plans

Completed/Underway

POLICY APPROACH

Roanoke's neighborhoods are the basic building blocks in the City. The City's commitment to reinvestment in neighborhoods has been a positive impetus to retain and attract families to Roanoke. Unlike suburban jurisdictions where there is investment in development of new areas and expansion of services, Roanoke is a well-defined city that must be able to maintain a long-term strategy of reinvestment in both the physical and social fabric of existing neighborhoods. To achieve the goal of being a vibrant, healthy, sustainable city, every neighborhood should be an active participant in determining its own future.

Each neighborhood should have a sustainable balance of housing types, sizes, prices, and densities to meet the needs of current and future residents at all stages of their lives. Construction of new housing in Roanoke has fallen dramatically over the last two decades, while the City's existing housing stock continues to age. Like most mature cities, Roanoke has little land available for development of new residential neighborhoods. Infill housing on individual lots is not economically feasible in many existing neighborhoods. Only larger sites that offer the opportunity for multiple units will allow economies of scale that will encourage development of "housing clusters" that offer opportunities for a diversity of housing type, price, and scale. New sites must be created to promote development of housing clusters on vacant or underused sites within the City. As private market assembly of property is not always feasible, proactive public initiatives may be necessary to assist in packaging land.

Roanoke's neighborhoods should function as "villages," with downtown serving as the City's premier urban village. Higher densities of development should be concentrated around existing or planned mixed-use neighborhood commercial areas, with housing density decreasing away from the village center. Neighborhood parks, schools, and community centers should be maintained and improved. Neighborhood streets and streetscapes should encourage pedestrian activity and bicycle use. Streets and roads should encourage a compact urban form and not enable sprawl.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE



Housing Clusters: Housing clusters are market-rate residential developments consisting of a mixture of residential uses (single-family, two-family, townhouses) on a large site, located within or adjacent to existing developments of established neighborhoods. Assembly of land for the development of housing clusters will promote neighborhood revitalization,

replace derelict or neglected structures, and complement the surrounding neighborhood. Illustrations of a housing cluster, infill development on small parcel, and a large site in a traditional neighborhood development are shown in Chapter 4, City Design.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE



Village Centers: Village centers are centers in neighborhoods containing a mixture of higher-density residential uses and neighborhood commercial uses. They serve as the focus of neighborhood activity. Village centers vary in size and scale depending on the nature of uses and size of the surrounding neighborhood. Smaller village centers are often contained within

a single block, while larger centers may have a mix of retail and office space and are anchored by larger institutions such as churches or schools. Centers generally have fixed limits so that commercial activity does not encroach into the surrounding residential areas. See Chapter 4, City Design, for examples of village centers.

POLICIES

- NH P1. **Sustainable population.** Roanoke will have a balanced, sustainable population. Roanoke will promote its urban assets, diversity, convenience, and affordability to retain existing residents and attract new ones.
- NH P2. **Neighborhoods as villages.** Neighborhoods will function as villages, offering opportunities to live, work, shop, play, and interact in a neighborhood setting. Neighborhood-oriented commercial activity will be encouraged in well-defined village centers.
- NH P3. **Neighborhood plans.** The City will adopt neighborhood plans for all neighborhoods. Neighborhood plans will address land use, zoning, transportation, infrastructure, neighborhood services, and the development of village centers and recognize those neighborhoods with architectural and historic value, among other issues. Neighborhood plans should include indicators for measuring neighborhood health and sustainability. Implementation of neighborhood plans will be considered in operating and capital budgets.
- NH P4. **Downtown neighborhood.** Downtown will be developed as Roanoke's premier urban village with a mix of high-density residential, commercial, retail uses and live/work space.
- NH P5. **Housing choice.** The City will have a balanced, sustainable range of housing choices in all price ranges and design options that encourage social and economic diversity throughout the City. Concentration of federally subsidized, assisted or affordable housing will be discouraged. The City will recommend ways to overcome impediments to fair housing by identifying barriers to housing choice, encouraging fair housing education to the community, challenging housing discrimination, and requiring affirmative marketing of developments using City funds.
- NH P6. **Housing clusters.** Development of housing clusters will be used to encourage and promote neighborhood revitalization, replace derelict or neglected structures, and complement the surrounding neighborhood. A housing cluster is a market-rate residential development consisting of a mixture of residential uses on a large site located within or adjacent to existing developments of established neighborhoods.

- NH P7. **Affordable housing.** Affordable housing will be available in all parts of the City. Sustainable neighborhoods require a competitive mix of affordable and market-rate housing opportunities.
- NH P8. **Publicly-assisted housing.** Publicly-assisted housing efforts and shelters will be of the highest quality that enhances neighborhoods. Publicly-assisted housing and shelters will be equitably distributed in all parts of the region.

ACTIONS

Village Centers

- NH A1. Revise zoning ordinance to encourage the development of higher-density, mixed-use village centers and strengthen site development, landscaping, and signage requirements in village centers.
- NH A2. Identify and map existing and potential village center locations.
- NH A3. Rezone existing and potential village center locations to encourage and accommodate higher-density development and a mixture of uses.
- NH A4. Develop a strategy for improving existing village centers, redeveloping underutilized centers, and creating new centers in key locations through the neighborhood planning process.
- NH A5. Consider ND, Neighborhood Design District, overlay zoning for qualifying centers in Rehabilitation and Conservation Areas to encourage compatible design of development in village centers.
- NH A6. Develop interdepartmental and agency approaches to target public improvements in village centers.
- NH A7. Locate City services in village centers, where feasible.

Neighborhood Plans

- NH A8. Develop and adopt four to six neighborhood plans annually.
- NH A9. Address the following in neighborhood plans: land use, transportation, public facilities and services, greenways, utilities, and economic development.
- NH A10. Develop indicators for neighborhood health and sustainability.
- NH A11. Involve neighborhood organizations, civic groups, and businesses in the development and implementation of neighborhood plans.

Marketing Programs

- NH A12. Inventory and increase marketing of existing housing programs and incentives that encourage new residential development.
- NH A13. Develop housing marketing strategy to identify new programs and incentives.

Neighborhood Appearance

- NH A14. Increase infrastructure funding to improve and enhance existing neighborhood streets and streetscapes; explore alternative funding sources such as grants and private contributions.

- NH A15. Strengthen neighborhood organizations and civic groups to develop neighborhood pride.
- NH A16. Adopt design and performance standards for neighborhood streets, sidewalks, and tree canopies.
- NH A17. Identify gateways, key intersections, and major corridors for physical improvement that promotes neighborhood identity and pride.

Downtown Neighborhood

- NH A18. Revise zoning ordinance and review the application of the building code to permit development of live/work space.
- NH A19. Develop economic incentives and review the application of building code regulations in the downtown to encourage residential development.
- NH A20. Inventory and market vacant lots and underutilized sites for higher-density, mixed-use development.

Housing Strategy

- NH A21. Complete a housing survey that defines and maps sustainability indicators on a citywide basis.
- NH A22. Develop a housing plan as a component of the comprehensive plan. The housing plan should include guidelines for housing choice, sustainability, and social and economic diversity.
- NH A23. Develop criteria for evaluating new residential development proposals to ensure compatibility with surrounding neighborhoods and support of the City's goals of a balanced, sustainable housing supply.
- NH A24. Strengthen enforcement of building maintenance codes, revise Rental Inspection Program to include periodic inspections as permitted by law, and develop a strategy to increase geographic coverage of Rental Inspection Program.
- NH A25. Aggressively market the Real Estate Tax Abatement program to encourage rehabilitation of older homes.
- NH A26. Consider demolition of derelict or neglected structures, outside of historic districts, when:
 - Rehabilitation is not economically feasible.
 - Plans for appropriate redevelopment are approved.
 - Redevelopment furthers the neighborhood goals for a balanced, sustainable housing supply.
- NH A27. Identify and assemble vacant or underutilized land for the development of housing clusters. Consider using public or community development corporations to assemble property for housing development.
- NH A28. Revise zoning ordinance to permit higher-density residential and mixed-use development for housing clusters. Where appropriate, rezone identified areas for development of housing clusters.

- NH A29. Revise zoning ordinance to encourage quality infill development that reflects the character of the neighborhood including infill development standards.

Affordable Housing

- NH A30. Develop a plan for the location of shelters, transitional living facilities, and day facilities that provides appropriate services in all areas of the City and the region, taking into account access to public transportation and proximity to other support services.
- NH A31. Develop affordable housing plans including programs that include a mix of housing types and opportunities for both rental and homeownership as part of the housing plan.

3.2 ENVIRONMENTAL, CULTURAL, AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

BACKGROUND

Natural Environment

Roanoke's natural environment is one of its most important assets. The City's location amid the Blue Ridge Mountains, combined with access to natural resources such as the Roanoke River, Blue Ridge Parkway, Smith Mountain Lake, and parks, provides a natural environmental quality in an urban setting. Consequently, how the region conserves and protects the natural environment is particularly important to the quality of life for Roanoke's residents. Regional cooperation and joint environmental programs and protection policies are essential to maintaining the natural environment residents enjoy.

Parks and Recreation

Roanoke's parks system consists of more than 60 parks and eight neighborhood recreation centers located throughout the City. In September 2000, City Council adopted the *Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan* as a component of the *Roanoke Vision 1985-2005 Comprehensive Plan*. The master plan balances the customer requirements for



larger-scale recreation facilities, such as an aquatic facility, with the benefits of smaller-scale neighborhood parks and open space. Funding for full implementation of the *Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan* has not been identified; the City has committed to incremental phases of construction or rehabilitation.

Greenways

Greenways are corridors of protected open space that are managed for recreation, conservation, and non-motorized transportation. In 1997, City Council adopted a conceptual greenways plan as a component of the City's comprehensive plan. The City currently has seven greenways in various stages of planning or development. Priority projects include the Railside Linear Walk, the Mill Mountain Greenway, the Lick Run Greenway, the Roanoke River Greenway, the Tinker Creek Greenway, and the Murray Run Greenway. Funding for greenways is a combination of City funds, in-kind/case donations, state grants, and federal reimbursement grants generally funded through the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21).